1: Turnbull E-4. 5 (1951-1955) 1965 PO4 Pygmies PO4
Mbuti

[P. 165-A]

There is a profusion of wild flowers and orchids and many different kinds of vine. The Mbuti make great use of various species of *Ficus* for the manufacture of barkcloth, and certain vines are used to make string and hunting nets. There are also trees that give a sap which, if taken from one part of the tree, can be used as a cooking oil and, if taken from another, can be used either as an adhesive or as fuel for a torchlight. The Mbuti have a knowledge of effective medicines prepared from plants and roots, and also of poisons.

Schebesta (1952, 95–147), in response to persons who hold that the Mbuti have no culture of their own (e.g., Kerken, 1944), points to their remarkable adaptation to the forest environment. The level of their culture may not be high, but, even though primitive and "conservative," it is distinctly a forest culture and distinctly Pygmy. Their needs are few, and raw material is abundant. The striking thing is the minimal extent to which they utilize this material. Both Schebesta (1952, 98) and Putnam attribute this to the super-sufficiency of the environment itself which, making minimal demands, is accorded a minimal response. Mate-

1: Turnbull E-4. 5 (1951-1955) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

with metal points. Schebesta believes that a number of different poisons are used, apart from the poison described in detail by Parke (1891). The poisoned arrows are used against tree-dwelling animals, particularly monkeys, and hardly ever against antelopes or larger game. Schebesta contradicts, in the light of his own experience, Stanley's (1890) assertion that Mbuti hunt buffalo and elephant with poisoned arrows.

Mbuti use of antidotes is not known to Schebesta (1941, 65).

ECONOMIC LIFE

Hunting

Schebesta (1941, 86 ff.) describes the various hunting techniques used throughout the Ituri. The Efe among whom he did his most detailed work are primarily archers. They do not know the net hunt and seldom practice the communal beat (Efe: *beghe*). Schebesta (1941, 86) ranks the ambush as most important. This method of hunting is used by the older men no longer able to track game successfully. They lie in wait and imitate the call of the game, attracting it until it is within range of their iron-tipped arrows.

The daily hunt, however, is the track hunt

[TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 171-B]

1: Turnbull E-4. 5 (1951-1955) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

[ARCHERS]

[P. 187-A]

802 speaking archer bands in the northeastern part of the Ituri, near Gombari. He finds the only common characteristic to be the habit of counting in pairs and the use of the term "many" for anything over five. Finger signs for numbers up to five and a separate sign for 10 are used also by the Mamvu villagers. Thus 15 arrows would be "many times two arrows and one." Some of the examples that he gives show either the disinterest or lack of skill of these archers in exact numeration—such as the woman who for totals of four and seven arrows (the article used by Maes for his tests) gave, respectively, the numbers 40 and 10.

278 824 The use of effective poisons is well attested. Geil (1905), who reported reliably on other aspects of the life of Efe archers, mentions their knowledge of antidotes. Schebesta (1941, 65) denies having come across these. He (1941, 228 ff.) does, however, give details of various effective medicines prepared from forest plants. In some instances these medicines, or the methods of application, have magical significance. They seem unable to cure such affliction as certain types of fever, leprosy, advanced dysentery, and gout.

[755] [1157]

1: Turnbull E-4. 5 (1951-1955). 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

[NET HUNTERS]

[P. 205-A]

224 411 hit the target. At tracking, however, the Mbuti are excellent, being able to move swiftly and silently through the forest. They can, in Putnam's estimation, catch game with their hands, and often do so, as successfully as by using their bows and arrows. Iron-tipped arrows are used on larger game, and untipped, poisoned arrows [278] are used mainly for monkeys and birds. The poison is prepared individually, strophanthus being the vital plant acting as a heart stimulant.

224 Hunting dogs are used both during the net hunt and by individual owners for hunting wild boar.

I: Turnbull E-4. 5 (1951-1955) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

[NET HUNTERS]

[P. 209-B]

the use of poison for catching fish. The poison (KiBira: *matungu*) is prepared from the bark of the *atungo* tree, and has been known to blind people who get it in the eyes. Fish caught by the children are placed by them in leaves with salt and roasted on fire embers. Salt is obtained either from plantain skins, or in the *ido*, which are open, well-watered clearings found in the forest. Children also hunt rats and mice with their miniature bows and arrows.

226 [278] • 252 857 263 857 224

Gathering

As with the archers, gathering is mostly the province of women and children (mainly women), though men will gather any edible food they happen to pass. Gathering is an individual rather than a collective activity. Gathering activities that require the climbing of high trees, such as the collection of most nuts, are undertaken by men, who also collect termites, silkworms, and honey. The contribution of children, though not organized, is appreciable.

222 462 857

The foods available are the same as those described by Schebesta. It appears that the net hunters make much fuller use of forest products, the most important of which are nuts, edible fungus, and edible roots, each of which can be subdivided into a number of different species, not only insuring a supply at all seasons, for each species has its own season, but also variety.

222

[TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 209-B]

1: Turnbull E-4. 5 (1951-1955) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

[NET HUNTERS]

[P.222-C]

Far less important than disease or accidental death is animal hostility—elephants, buffalo, and leopards being the major sources of danger. It is extremely rare for any Pygmy to be killed by one of these animals. The net-hunting Mbuti have effective medicines against poisonous snakes.

For most illnesses, says Putnam, the Pygmy can find a local remedy. For stomach upsets and diarrhea an enema (a hollow reed with a gourd gummed to one end) is administered, with the use of vegetable decoctions containing *gorogoro* bark for the former complaint, and *tebbo* liana for the latter. These enemas are also used to produce abortions. For ailments that they are unable to cure and that are foreign to them, some may seek the help of a villager witch doctor, though Mbuti opinion varies as to their efficiency.

Death, then, is accepted as just as natural a phenomenon as birth, and the body is accorded little ritual respect. There are, unlike Schebesta's account for the archers, cited examples of wailing. The following instances taken from the notes of Anne Putnam illustrate its extent.

1: Turnbull E-4. 5 (1951-1955) 1985 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

[NET HUNTERS]

There is no record of any form of execution, though it has been known for the aged and infirm, too sick to care for themselves, or for those suspected of being possessed of supernatural powers, to disappear or to die of some strange sickness, under unusual circumstances. It was Putnam's opinion that such deaths might have been occasioned deliberately, but he had no means of verification. [114]

INTELLECTUAL AND ARTISTIC LIFE

Exact Knowledge

Counting

Putnam mentions the use of finger signs in counting and the Mbuti habit of counting in pairs. Despite this simplicity, however, they are able to assess quantity accurately and speedily, as witnessed by their dexterity in their favorite gambling game in which beans are thrown onto a mat. The success of the throw depends on whether or not a combination of four results. The Pygmy knows at a glance whether he has to throw in an extra bean or slip one out in order to make the necessary adjustment. If there is disagreement, the beans are checked in pairs of pairs.

Medicine

Putnam frequently tried to copy the preparation of poisons used by the net hunters on

[P 231-D]

1: Turnbull E-4. 5 (1951-1955) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

[NET HUNTERS]

[P.232-A]

278 411 their arrows but seldom achieved the same effect. The ingredients were known to him, and he concluded some special skill was used in the actual preparation. There is no mention of antidotes to these poisons.

278 Putnam knew of the existence of effective medicine among the net hunters, but no details survive in the notes. Anne Putnam's notes, however, mention a number of cases in which she observed the use of indigenous medicines and treatment.

752 757 During a fight a boy was knocked unconscious by a blow from a piece of wood. He was immediately propped up; the main concern seemed to be to prevent him from lying flat on the ground. Even when semiconscious, the boy was not allowed to lie down. This possibility seemed to frighten the Pygmies more than anything else, and for a while no other treatment was given. Then some incisions were made on his chest, and a leaf was applied.

757 Against toothache a certain leaf (not identified) is chopped fine and mixed with water. This mixture is poured from a leaf cup down each nostril.

1: Turnbull E-4. 5 (1951-1955) 1265 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

[NET HUNTERS]

[P. 232-C]

inch thick, packed tight. The top layer of dry leaves and kindling are soaked with oil and set on fire. The fire is kept going for about four hours, then the patient is taken out and hot leaves are applied. This treatment may be followed by hot baths, scarification and insertion of herbal medicine into the wounds, and resting on a bed, but none of this is said to be absolutely necessary. 757

A young man, given to being seized with trembling fits, is calmed by having incisions on his stomach rubbed with a black powder. A liquid is poured down his nose from a leaf funnel.

A certain type of bark, *ikanya*, extremely poisonous, is used to procure an abortion by making a decoction from it and giving it to the pregnant woman to inhale. It appears that even inhaling the dry bark might be effective, but is not certainly so. 847 278 824

2: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti
Congo-Kinshasa FO1

death, will be kept well clear of the forest, whose malign influence could adversely affect the outcome of the crisis.

While the net-hunt divides the band into nuclear-family units insofar as each net clearly belongs to a nuclear family, there is no particular order for setting out on the hunt. Nuclear families may split up right at the beginning, children joining their age mates, women going off together, the menfolk forming clusters of friends or brothers, in much the order in which they will hunt. It is always decided the night before, by common discussion and consent, where the hunt is to take place, and everyone makes his way there of his own accord, generally passing by the hunting fire on the way. On arrival the women will already be mostly separated from the men, and invisibly take up their stations while the men silently stretch their nets out through the undergrowth, supporting them on the foliage, the ends of each net being tied to those on either side of it.

The hunters generally take up their stand near the center of their net, but the practice varies according to their relationship with their hunting neighbors, and also according to whether they have any sons with them at the net. When the extremes are ready (the setting up begins in the middle of the semicircle) a signal is given to the women, who immediately start closing in from their opposing semicircle, beating the ground with branches, shouting, yelling and hooting. The men remain concealed until the very last moment. They always lie in wait behind the nets, and will only cross into the circle to go to someone's assistance when game is caught. Game is not generally shot at or speared until it is in the net or until it shows signs of escaping. It is then that the Mbuti must know the likely whereabouts of all his fellows, as the strophanthus poison used most widely is as deadly to human beings as to animals.[1]

Once an animal is killed, and each cast of the nets may bring in several animals, it is taken by the wife of the lucky net-owner and put into her carrying basket, to be shared out on return to the camp. If the animal is a large one, and too heavy to put in a basket, either one

[1] When the poison is prepared, one test for its strength is to make a slight cut in the forearm and to allow the blood to trickle down for an inch. The poisoned wooden tip of an arrow is then touched to the blood below the wound. If, as the Mbuti say, the poison "walks up the arm," they claim to feel a tickling sensation and hurriedly wipe the blood away. If the poison does not "walk up the arm" it is not strong enough. So wary are the Mbuti of poisoned arrows that they carry them thoroughly sheathed in a bundle of leaves, in case they accidentally scratch themselves. Also, when they have fired and lost a poisoned arrow, they may spend a considerable time trying to find it rather than leave it as a possible danger to other hunters.

2: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1960) 1965 PO4 Pygmies PO4
Mbuti
Congo-Kinshasa PO1

were, harm upon another. Masisi put it as well as it could be put when discussing Abeti's death (pp. 61–62), allegedly due to an Ngwana's use of sorcery. The circumstances were such—the three healthy "accused" all dying within such a short space of time following the curse—that there was a general discussion of village sorcery. There was disagreement of opinion as to whether or not it involved supernatural power, as claimed by the villagers. Most Mbuti stated bluntly that this was impossible, for such power was necessarily good. They held that the deaths had all been caused by poison. Others were not so sure. But the crux of the discussion was that whether caused by supernatural power or by poison, the action was not that of a man. Masisi said, "If you have a quarrel with a man you hit him with a wooden club, and he sees who hit him. You do not go and hide yourself and kill him with your thoughts."

While the Mbuti seek to remove themselves as far as possible from sorcery, feeling as though they were contaminated by it, their attitude to other associated supernatural beliefs of the villagers is quite different, being determined by different experience. A villager who has cursed one man may claim that the sickness of that man's distant cousin is a result of his curse, or that the falling of a tree that nearly killed the man's child was equally a result of the curse. These are not allegations that can be proved or disproved, and the Mbuti consequently have a somewhat ambivalent attitude toward sorcery; their disbelief is tinged, at least, by a reluctant suspicion.

However, the villagers also believe that there exist various malevolent spirits, sometimes spirits of sorcerers, and that these spirits have to be avoided, for there is no sure way of placating or propitiating them. Their abode is the forest, which to the villagers is the abode of all evil. Their powers are phenomenal and almost insuperable, avoidance being the only sure safeguard, ritual propitiation being enough to prevent the spirits from entering the village. Thus the forest is a place to be avoided on account of the spirits.

The Mbuti see two things very clearly. One is that such spirits simply do not exist in their forest, and the other is that this particular village belief deserves to be maintained for as long as it is effective in keeping villagers out of the forest. Consequently the Mbuti, who are great storytellers at all times, delight in stories—among themselves and in front of villagers—that enumerate the powers and horrors of such evil forest spirits. Sometimes the stories are of village origin, embellished by Mbuti imagination; sometimes they are pure